REDEFINING BELONGING: THE BOUNDARIES OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN
INSTITUTIONS AND EVERYDAY LIFE

by

Jonathan Freeman Walker

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in
Sociology

Charlotte

2017

Approved by:

_____
Dr. Scott Fitzgerald

_____
Dr. Lisa Walker

_____
Dr. Vaughn Schmutz

ABSTRACT

JONATHAN FREEMAN WALKER. Redefining belonging: the boundaries of religious identity in institutions and everyday life. (Under the direction of DR. SCOTT T. FITZGERALD)

This study examines how religious identity and boundaries are constructed at three separate levels: the institutional, the local, and the individual. Using the case of Forest Hill Apostolic Church, I analyze the relationships between these three levels by examining data collected from denominational documents, participant observation at church services and activities, and semi-structured interviews with congregation members. Analysis suggests that while there are patterned similarities between levels there is also significant variation. Discourse at the local and individual levels blurs the definitions and boundaries of Apostolic identity set by the institutional church. The analysis reveals what I term self-reflective boundary work, or reminders not to think of oneself or community as superior to others, as an important component of this process. In addition, respondents suggest that there are significant differences in how local churches define identity and boundaries over space and time. This lends support to prior research that suggests boundary work is context dependent as well as work on religious identity that suggests that local congregations are influential in the construction of religious identity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my committee members for their support and suggestions along the way. Your guidance and expertise has given this project a direction it would have not otherwise found. To my chair, Dr. Scott Fitzgerald, thank you for encouraging me and providing me with the tools both intellectually and materially to make a project such as this possible. I would also like to thank my fellow graduate students who listened to my thoughts and helped me develop them along the way.

I would also like to thank those outside the university that made this all possible. First, to my close friends and family who have supported me from applying to graduate school to the completion of this thesis. I would not have been able to do it without your emotional support, encouragement, and acceptance of days long disappearances into the graduate lab. Finally, I would like to say a tremendous thank you to the leadership and congregants at Forest Hill for their embrace and support of me and this project. You are truly a hospitable and loving community, thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Scholarship on boundaries has demonstrated both the symbolic and social dimensions of inclusion and exclusion (Bourdieu 1984 [1979], Lamont 1992, Lamont and Molnar 2002). Abstract and symbolic distinctions made by people and groups help them define who belongs and who does not by classifying things and people in the world. Membership in different social groups or categories[1] is defined by the boundaries placed around what it means to belong to a particular group. These symbolic boundaries become the foundation for social exclusion as only those who reside on the inside of those boundaries are accepted as legitimate members of the group. Boundary processes not only define membership in groups but also the identities that arise from peoples' identification with those groups. Historically, sociologists have conceptualized groups as having a bounded and unified culture (Sewell, Jr. 2005) and, by extension, bounded and unified effects on the construction of boundaries and identities. Correspondingly, scholars have conceptualized religious denominations as unproblematically shaping how their members construct boundaries and identity. Recent scholarship, however, has emphasized the more fluid, relational, and interactional elements of culture, boundaries, and identities (Cerulo 1997, Edgell 2012, Lamont 2001, Lizardo and Strand 2009).

While most denominations have a centralized organizational structure that acts as the official voice of the group as a whole, most members' interaction with a denomination takes place at the local level. Thus, the local level is where people acquire the tools with which they talk about and enact their identities as members of a

---

[1] While some scholars make a distinction between groups and categories, this paper will use the terms interchangeably as it discusses the implications of both being a part of a concrete, organized social group as well as being a member of an abstract, imagined social category.

denomination and the boundaries that define those identities. This study examines local congregational life at Forest Hill Apostolic Church, a member of the denomination the United Pentecostal Church International, and its effect on how its members define what it means to be an "Apostolic Pentecostal". The study seeks to investigate several dynamics related to the relationship between denominational, or official institutional, boundaries and how members of the denomination use (or do not use) these boundaries when constructing identity in their everyday life. I do this by examining the relationship between three levels, or orders, at which boundaries are constructed: the institutional, interactional, and individual. Specifically, I do this by examining how the symbolic boundaries around Apostolic identity are constructed at the highest level of institutional authority (the denomination at-large), how they are constructed at the local-interactional level (the congregation), and how they are constructed at the individual level (in everyday life). Examining the different levels at which boundary processes play out can give us better insight into the interactional, contextual, and situational dimensions of identities and their boundaries.[2] Though symbolic boundaries can come in many shapes and forms, this discussion will focus on the unique beliefs and practices that demarcate denominational identity in order to better understand both the cognitive and embodied distinctions that constitute identity.

In order to investigate how people negotiate their religious identity in the context of institutional belonging this study seeks to answer the following questions:

---

[2] The concepts of "identities" and "boundaries" are closely related in this study in that identities are composed of certain characteristics (here operationalized as beliefs and practices) that define them. These same characteristics then become the material people use in constructing boundaries and establishing who they believe can rightfully make a claim on a particular identity.

1. How closely coupled are the official boundaries constructed by the institutional denomination and those constructed by members in everyday life?

2. What role does local context play in shaping how members define boundaries?

Forest Hill is a unique case for the study of how these different levels interact with one another in the construction of boundaries as its leadership self-consciously attempts to undo much of the symbolic and social exclusion that has characterized the denomination in the past and in other places. In essence, Forest Hill is redefining Apostolic identity and what it means to be part of the Apostolic community. In addition, its members symbolically expand the possibility of being authentically Christian outside of being Apostolic through a discourse of personalism that emphasizes the importance of a personal relationship with God. Public and individual discourse at Forest Hill contained several boundary blurring strategies as well as themes of inclusion and the legitimacy of difference. These strategies and themes result from what I term self-reflective boundary work, a form of boundary work that encourages people to not view themselves or their group as superior to others. In addition, the study explores descriptions of spatial-temporal differences in how Apostolic identity is defined and their implications for how context shapes the construction of boundaries and identities. While boundary blurring and differences are clearly present, there are nonetheless patterned consistencies in descriptions of important elements of Apostolic identity between different levels. Overall, the study suggest that there are differences in how boundaries are drawn at different levels and that local context plays a mediating role between institutional and individual

boundary work. This supports a view of boundaries as fluid and contextually dependent while simultaneously maintaining a basic structure (Lamont 2001).

The remainder of the paper will address these issues in six sections. It will begin with a review of how institutions shape boundaries and identities – with a particular focus on religious institutions and identities. Second will be a discussion of my case and methods. The third will identify some official institutional boundaries outlined by Forest Hill's denominational body – the United Pentecostal Church International - by examining organizational documents. Fourth will be an account of how identity is constructed at the local level by examining public discourse and practice at Forest Hill. Fifth will explore how members of Forest Hill construct their identity in their everyday life and negotiate the boundaries set by the institutional church. The final section will discuss the implications of the findings for the study of boundaries and identity.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE

Scholarship on the relationship between classification, boundaries, and identity have illuminated connections between the personal and the social (Anderson 1983, Cohen 1985, Jenkins 2014, Lamont 1992). They have demonstrated just how intertwined the phenomenological experience of the individual is with the institutional forces that act upon them, but they also show how individuals act with agency and creativity within those institutions. Much recent work in cultural sociology has attempted to address this relationship by examining how peoples' identification with, or perceived membership in, different social categories or groups such as race, ethnicity, class, or gender affects how they construct identities and acquire the symbolic resources they use to draw boundaries between their group and others (Brubaker et al. 2004, Bourdieu 1979, Lamont 2000). These works are couched in the assumption that culture operates as a tool-kit, or a set of symbolic resources from which people draw – consciously or not - when talking about and acting in the world (Swidler 1986). In doing this they have helped scholars to more clearly understand the relationship between structure, culture, and agency as they demonstrate how institutions provide the cultural resources which individuals use in everyday life to think and act with. Thus, institutions are shown to construct cultural repertoires, or "systems of meaning that characterize various symbolic communities" (Cerulo 1997:395) that shape peoples' sense of self and courses of action. While there has been a prolific amount of scholarship concerning boundaries and membership in different social categories, less work has focused explicitly on religious identity. Though religious identity can be talked about and conceptualized in a number of ways, this paper

seeks to investigate how membership in, or identification with, a specific religious group affects the way people talk about religious beliefs and embody religious practices.

2.1 Boundaries and Identity

Since the founding of the discipline, sociologists have been interested in the relationship between classification, boundaries, and religious identity. Early works such as Durkheim's (1954[1912]) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* sought to understand the relationship between individual subjectivity and the groups people belong to. This work forms some of the earliest foundations for understanding how groups shape the way their members classify and categorize things in the world and, subsequently, draw boundaries between their group and others. In this work Durkheim explores classification systems and observes how people make symbolic distinctions that allow them to classify things in the world as either belonging to the realm of the sacred or the profane. This structuring and ordering of the world provides people with an interpretive framework with which to make sense of and act in the world. He saw these systems of classification as contributing to a shared definition of reality for the group and a shared moral order. This moral order defines the symbolic boundaries of the group. These beliefs about the world and the resulting sense of community belonging are reinforced through rituals, or collective behaviors. He defines religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite in one single community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (1954[1912]:47).

Durkheim's work gives insight into how and why people might identify with groups and how identification generates a sense of group belonging and identity. This relationship between phenomenological experience and institutional definitions of reality was further expounded upon by scholars such as Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Mary Douglas (1986). Collectively they show how people's experience of everyday life is shaped by the cultural and social forces that surround them. Though these works are not specifically couched in the language of identity, they have implications concerning how the systems of meaning produced by the institutions people are embedded in shape their sense of self and belonging in different groups.

Cultural sociologists have built upon ideas of how classifications shape identity by developing the concept of symbolic boundaries. Symbolic boundaries are "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space. Tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality" (Lamont and Molnar 2002:168). Concerning membership in groups, symbolic boundaries are the cultural material people use demarcate the borders between "us" and "them" and generate feelings of similarity with and belonging in a group. At its core, the study of boundaries is the study of meaning making processes and how people make sense of themselves and others.

Though studies of identity have proliferated in sociology and other social sciences, the sheer number of conceptualizations and methodological approaches to its study can make for confusing terrain.[3] Despite the multiplicity of the concept there are a few key principles that most scholars agree on. Contrary to earlier conceptions of the

---

[3] See Cerulo (1997) for an extensive review.

relationship between identity and group membership, one contemporary idea concerning identity is the rejection of the assumption that all members of a collective have a unified experience and construct their identities in identical ways. Drawing on a tool-kit approach (Swidler 1986), boundary scholars situate themselves between constructionist and essentialist approaches to identity (Lamont 2001). They pay attention to how "boundaries are shaped by context, and particularly by the cultural repertoires, traditions, and narratives that individuals have access to" (Lamont and Molnar 2002:171). Thus, individuals are not simply mindless consumers of culture but can act creatively in how they construct their identities. However, they are bound by the context and specific cultural materials and meaning systems that are available to them. Moreover, work on boundaries recognizes that, rather than being binary, boundaries have relative strengths to them and can be more or less permeable in different contexts.

2.2 Boundaries and Institutions

Recent scholarship has demonstrated how the categories that are constructed by institutions can become the material for boundary work conducted by individuals. Shoshana (2007) shows how the Israeli government created a new social category for members of the Jewish community returning from the diaspora. The government created a school for what they called the "gifted disadvantaged", a category that they created and imbued with particular meanings. His work examines organizational documents that discuss the creation of this new identity and examines the phenomenological experience of how students of the school experience that identity years later. In this he also notes that institutional definitions of identity uphold both social and personal orders. Social orders

being "cultural-organizational structures" and personal orders being "the ways in which symbolic classifications and distinctions act to shape subjectivity, self-management, and the processes of personal cognitive economy required in everyday life" (2007:352). Institutional definitions of identity shape not only the life of the group but shape the individual's everyday experience and contribute to something akin to Bourdieu's (1977) habitus, or dispositions of perception and other mental and bodily habits that become second nature.

The study of boundaries builds upon a larger body of work concerning social identity. Jenkins (2014) recognizes the relational nature of identity construction and boundaries that arise from their definitions. He views identity as a process of "identification" and of the "systematic establishment and signification…between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference" (2014:18). In this, identity is a process of "becoming" rather than being such that it is fluid and can change over time. He also proposes that people construct and experience the world in three distinct orders:

> the *individual order* is the human world as made up of embodied individuals and what-goes-on-in-their-heads; the *interaction order* is the human world as constituted in relationships between individuals, in what-goes-on-between-people; the *institutional order* is the human world of pattern and organisation, of established-ways-of-doing-things" (2014:39).[4]

These three orders are in constant interaction with one another and all contribute to the development of identities and the boundaries that define them. The remainder of this section will expand and reconceptualize the idea of an institutional order.

---

[4] The present study loosely follows the definitions in this typology in its analysis by attempting to examine these distinct orders, or levels, and their relationships with one another as they relate to the construction of boundaries and identity.

Much of the work on boundaries and identity addresses informal institutions, or the unwritten but socially shared rules that pattern peoples' beliefs and practices as members of certain categories or groups. In these cases there is no central, authoritative entity characterizing the meaning of belonging to a particular social category or defining how people should draw boundaries between the self and others. Rather, a variety of cultural forces are competing to define these identities and the boundaries that define them resulting in somewhat varied definitions depending on contextual and structural factors (Lamont 1992). Less work has systematically dealt with formal institutions, or those patterns of official beliefs and practices that are codified in and tied to organizational structures that define the boundaries of the identities of those embedded in them.[5] While distinguishing between formal and informal institutions can give insight into the different channels through which boundaries are constructed and identities are formed, not all formal institutions have the same effect on identity formation.

Religious denominations can have an especially influential effect on identity formation and the drawing of symbolic boundaries around legitimate religious identity. Like many groups or social categories, religious denominations have distinct subcultural identities (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock's 1996, Smith 1999) that are created through interaction and demarcate the boundaries between themselves and other groups. These identities are constructed by generating categorical distinctions that differentiate between who they are, what they believe, and how they practice with how other groups embody these dimensions. The collective identities that result from this process constitute reference groups that individuals identify themselves with. The symbolic markers –

---

[5] See Shoshana (2007) for an explicit treatment of the relationship between institutional and phenomenological boundary work.

rituals, language, practices, styles, beliefs, narratives, morals – that distinguish these groups from others define these differences and establish identifiable signifiers that indicate belonging in or exclusion from the group. This work of defining identity through distinction and symbolic boundaries is simultaneously a creation of culture (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock's 1996:12). Together these processes generate systems of meaning and ways of doing things that define the culture of the group and constitute what could be understood as a project in boundary maintenance.

Boundary maintenance processes help people to make sense of their identities and locate themselves and the groups they identify with into meaningful positions within society. These processes of differentiation, distinction, and classification of who belongs and who does not helps groups to define norms, values, and practices that aid in their evaluation of themselves in relation to other groups. These differentiation processes can be identified in both the discursive and organizational practices of communities. Even religious groups operating under the same superordinate identities – such as "Christian" - will engage in these processes differentially as they craft their unique subcultural identity within the field of religion itself that allows them to make finer categorical distinctions between themselves and other groups. Even so, the strength and moral weight of these of these symbolic distinctions can vary by denomination and even congregation (Ammerman 2003).

Studying formal institutions, such as religious denominations, allows us to systematically examine the relationship between officially defined institutional boundaries and the way individuals who identify with those institutions engage with and talk about those boundaries in their everyday life. Thus, we can examine the relationship

between how a denomination defines what it means to be a member of the community and how members of a denomination talk about what it means to them to be a member of that community. The officially defined beliefs and practices of a denomination constitute the boundaries of the symbolic community. To be a member of the community is to identify with the beliefs and embody the practices that define it. The construction of the boundaries that demarcate membership is relational in nature in that individuals and groups define themselves according to specific characteristics that constitute who they are ("us") in relation to who they are not ("them"). Boundaries become the "criteria for membership and group closure within imagined communities" (Lamont 2001: 181). Thus, boundaries are foundational in constructing identity as they establish criteria for group membership by defining "who we are" and "what we do" against "who we are not" and "what we do not do". Inherent in this dynamic of defining identity are processes of inclusion and exclusion. Symbolically defining what it means to be a member of a community establishes criteria for inclusion in the community. Thus, symbolic boundaries shape the social boundaries of a community by establishing who is included and who is excluded (Lamont and Molnar 2002).

As formal institutions, denominations define their boundaries and consequent criteria for membership by officially codifying their beliefs ("who we are") and practices ("what we do") in statements of faith and other organizational documents. In doing this denominations, as well as institutions more generally, help classify people and things in the world into categories (Douglas 1986, Zerubavel 1991). Research on social identity suggests that when people identify with a social category they engage in a process of self-categorization in which they take on characteristics associated with that category (Hogg

and Reid 2006). From this perspective, as institutions define what it means to belong to a category we would expect people to embody the characteristics that define that category. Additionally, with formal institutions there are external forces imposing definitions and enforcing the boundaries of belonging to a category or community. Given both the internal and external processes of definition it would be reasonable to expect a relative convergence between institutional and phenomenological accounts of identity, especially in groups with an officially exclusive orientation.

2.3 Review of Boundaries and Religious Identity

In line with broader trends in the social sciences, the study of religion has taken a cultural turn since the 1980's.[6] The difficulty of meaningfully understanding religious identity and how different forms of measurement can produce dramatically different images of the groups under discussion has been documented by scholars of religion (Ammerman 2007, Hackett and Lindsay 2008). Even when denominational affiliation is clear official institutional definitions of identity do not necessarily predict the beliefs and practices that play out in members' everyday lives (Ammerman 2003; Edgell 2003). Scholars such as Wuthnow (2011) have noted the importance of examining discourse in understanding religion, culture, and institutions. Listening to the way people talk can give us insight into these domains in ways that quantitative studies are unable to.

Though not always explicitly using the concept of boundaries, a number of recent studies on religious identity have examined the relationship between institutional and individual constructions of religious identity. Some of these studies focus more on

---

[6] See Edgell 2012 for review.

institutional level boundary processes as groups attempt to renegotiate the boundaries of what it means to be a member of the community while others focus more on individual level processes of constructing religious identity. Conceptions of religious identity have changed dramatically since early writings. Nancy Ammerman notes that, "If religious identity ever was a given, it certainly is no longer" (2003:207). She sees the boundaries of religious identity as permeable and porous, that "categorical checklists" and "either/or assumptions" do not do justice to the complexity of religion in everyday life. A growing body of research supports this conception especially as traditional institutional boundaries are being challenged.

Scholars have examined how boundaries are renegotiated at the institutional, or group, level in a variety of domains. Regarding the issue of membership for homosexuals, Moon (2004) documents how two United Methodist congregations with differing orientations towards the issue negotiated the meaning of homosexuality in Christianity. While members of the same denomination these churches had different ways of drawing boundaries. She proposes that studying people's "everyday theologies" challenges "the assumption that church doctrine unproblematically represents what members believe" (2004:12). Her analysis also shows that meaning is developed through interaction and that language, or discourse, is vital in shaping how people think about issues. Also studying congregational openness to homosexuality, Adler (2012) finds a connection between local factors and openness. He develops a model in which he proposes that, when there are no external organizational norms pressuring a congregation, boundary bridging practices such as interfaith volunteering and interracial worship may contribute to the shaping congregational sexual boundaries. Together these demonstrate

how talk and practice at the local level can have an impact on the way that boundaries are drawn in a congregation.

Other studies have investigated the way that the boundaries of religious identity are bent and blurred. Examining documents by missionaries, or what he terms "boundary agents", Bok (2014) shows how they engage in a process of "symbolic filtering". As missionaries are tasked with converting people in new and foreign places they have to negotiate the boundaries of Christian identity by contextualizing the Christian message while attempting to maintain its core elements. In this they engage in a strategy of accommodation, or boundary blurring, in which they "cognitively allow various elements to pass through their symbolic boundaries" (2014:811). Christian Smith notes that this process is not new but that "religious traditions have always strategically renegotiated their collective identities by continually reformulating the ways their constructed orthodoxies engage with the changing sociocultural environments they confront" (1999:100). Edgell and Robey (2016) further demonstrate these boundary blurring tactics by studying how a congregation used ritual to blur the boundaries between members and non-members in an attempt to attract those who had a distaste for organized religion. These demonstrate how religious traditions and "boundary agents" can strengthen or weaken the boundaries around identity and the requirements for membership in response to changing conditions or desired goals.

Issues of accommodation and inclusion have been addressed by a number of other scholars as well. In Wuthnow's (2005) discussion on different Christians' approach to religious diversity and pluralism he develops a typology that includes "inclusivist", "spiritual shoppers", and "exclusivists" that could be imagined as individuals'

orientations toward constructing boundaries around legitimate religious identity. Mermis-Cava (2009) shows how Christians with a pluralist religious identity can simultaneously maintain a strong commitment to their denomination by engaging in rituals that allow them to maintain a meaning system that both reinforces and transcends institutional boundaries. Yukich (2010) explores how Catholic Workers in New York – a group that desires to be as inclusive as possible – engage in boundary work. She finds that the symbolic drawing of boundaries and "othering" is necessary to maintain a distinct collective identity, even for inclusive groups. However, while this process of distinguishing the group by defining it against others happens in the abstract, she observes that in their practice they include even those who they symbolically "other" such that the drawing of symbolic boundaries does not manifest in constructing social boundaries. This allows them to conduct the necessary work of distinguishing themselves from others while maintaining an identity of inclusion.

Exploring how individuals construct their religious identity in spite of institutional definitions, Dillion (1999) studies how marginalized Catholics – such as those who identify as homosexual – use the core symbols of Catholicism, such as participation in sacraments, to anchor their identity as Catholic while simultaneously working to expand the institutional boundaries of Catholic identity to include them. By anchoring themselves in core symbols of the faith those who are officially excluded from Catholic identity are able to maintain symbolic identification with the church as they seek to obtain official inclusion and redefine what it means to be Catholic. Investigating how a Christian organization helped individuals renegotiate the boundaries of religious identity, Thumma (1991) follows a gay evangelical organization as they help individuals incorporate a

previously incompatible part of the self into their Christian identity. Together these demonstrate the varied and complex ways that institutional and individual constructions of religious identity interact with one another and how institutions can draw boundaries that exclude or include certain identities.

In her study of an evangelical campus ministry, Wilkins (2008) studies how emotions become a symbolic boundary for the group. She suggests that, in constructing what it means to be a Christian, the group defines happiness as a vital part of Christian identity such that being a happy person is a virtual requirement of being a member of the group. Public discourse about happiness teaches members to think about themselves as happy which is reflected in how individuals talk about what it means for them to be a Christian. Not only does public discourse shape how individuals talk but leads them to conduct "emotion work" in which they align their emotional responses to situations to correspond with their identity as a happy person. This demonstrates how institutionalized symbolic boundaries shape religious identity both in discourse and in practice. While this addresses informal institutional boundaries, the current study seeks to extend these ideas by examining formal institutional boundaries that are officially codified as requirements for group membership.

As "the connection between official categories and popular self-understandings is seldom demonstrated in detail" (Brubaker et al. 2004:35), this study seeks to systematically investigate the relationship between official categories and everyday self-understandings by examining religious identity. While Brubaker et al.'s (2004) discussion was in the context of state definitions of categories this study will look at another authoritative institution that defines identity: the denomination. Not only will this study

examine the relationship between official institutional classifications and everyday

construction of identity but it will also investigate how local-interactional context and

discourses of inclusion shape this relationship.

CHAPTER 3: DATA AND METHODS

3.1 Forest Hill Apostolic Church

Forest Hill is a modest size congregation of between 300-350 members located in the southeastern United States. It is located on several acres of land with two buildings, a chapel and activity building. The entrance to the chapel is an open lobby space with a coffee station in one corner. On Sunday mornings ushers welcome those entering with smiles, handshakes, and hugs as people grab coffee and pastries. The sanctuary contains moveable seats with wide aisles between sections where people gather for conversation. At the front is an elevated stage with a podium and musical instruments. Located above the stage is a small nook in the wall containing a baptismal that is accessed from a second story on the back end of the building. There is a general lack of religious imagery except around holidays when special decorations are brought in to symbolize the events they celebrate.

There are two Sunday morning services as the congregation has outgrown the limited space in the sanctuary. Services always begin with a series of songs which are accompanied by instrumental music and are more often than not contemporary Christian songs. The stage is filled with instrumentalists and singers both male and female, black and white. While singing some members of the congregation raise their hands, jump up and down, speak in tongues, audibly thank God, and occasionally run through aisles or cry as expressions of worship. Song lyrics generally contain themes about the redemption, overcoming, and the freedom received through a relationship with God. While there is freedom of emotional and spiritual expression, an emphasis is placed on

order and the creation of a hospitable and welcoming environment as they seek to be "good hosts" to those unaccustomed to this expression of spirituality. After a few songs a lay leader announces community prayer requests which is followed by collective prayer that typically emphasizes God's ability to heal and help people overcome their trying circumstances. This is followed by a collection of tithes.

Following more songs Pastor Daniel[7] rises to the stage and welcomes the congregation as well as visitors and announces a time of greeting. During the time of greeting people walk around the sanctuary shaking hands, hugging, and talking with friends and newcomers alike. The congregation prides itself on being welcoming and friendly, two characteristics most would probably observe on their first visit. Afterwards the pastor delivers a message to the congregation that often deals with redemption, overcoming trying circumstances, and effectively living a loving and meaningful life. Following the sermon the entire congregation is invited to the space in front of the stage for an altar call during which people pray and are prayed for by others with the laying on of hands. The pastor also explicitly invites visitors to join with an assurance that they will not be made to feel awkward. At the conclusion of the service many loiter in conversation with friends and visitors before leaving.

One of the first things one might notice when visiting for the first time is the fusion of traditional and contemporary aesthetics. Many of the men wear business casual clothing while many women wear skirts or dresses that typically go past the knee, long sleeve shirts, and have hair that has been uncut for years or decades. This attire is typically not simply reserved for church but is part of one's everyday wardrobe. This

---

[7] All names used in this study are pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants.

traditionalism, however, is tempered by public references to popular culture, a coffee station adorned with wood and stone, the use of projector screens and lights, and contemporary music. In addition, the charismatic nature of the worship, common in Pentecostal circles, may be unfamiliar to those accustomed to traditional forms of Christian worship. These, along with other characteristics to be discussed in more detail later, are an expression of the unique identity of this congregation and its tradition.

Forest Hill has a unique subcultural identity (Smith 1999) in that, even among other Christian denominations, it has a distinctive set of beliefs and practices that demarcate it from other groups. Forest Hill is a member of the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI) which is a historically conservative denomination with a fundamentalist orientation towards belief and practice of the Christian faith in which they seek to align themselves as closely as possible with the teachings of the first century Christian apostles. Studying the UPCI in the 1970's Dearman said that their unique system of beliefs "gives them a feeling of identity with a group which claims to have discovered the absolutely 'true way'" (1974: 440).[8] Thus, at least historically, the boundaries of the group have been quite strong and it can reasonably be concluded that this would be reflected in official, local, and individual discourses.

Forest Hill represents a unique case for the study of groups with strong boundaries in that leaders at Forest Hill, aware of the need for their message to maintain relevance in a changing world, are attempting to generate a more inclusive community and message while maintaining core elements concerning what it means to identify with the category Apostolic. As a member of the UPCI there are a number of distinct beliefs

---

[8] This study updates and nuances this claim.

and practices that need to be upheld in order to maintain Apostolic-ness while simultaneously carving out space for including alternative ways of being Apostolic. According to the numbers, this project has thus far been successful as the church as experienced growth since the beginning of the current pastor's tenure. But pushing the boundaries of core beliefs and practices that officially define Apostolic identity is not without opposition as churches and individuals with a traditional orientation still constitute a majority of the denomination as a whole. The congregation and its leaders must balance the desire for a more inclusive identity and practices while being a part of a larger community that defines identity more exclusively.

The present study suggests that public discourse at the local level mediates between official institutional boundaries and talk about those boundaries at the individual level. At both of these levels, as boundaries are being constructed so are identities. The identities being constructed at these different levels may be decoupled from one another as contextual factors steer local discourse and practices toward reinforcing or decreasing the strength of boundaries. What it means to be Apostolic as externally defined by the institutional church and the way that individuals talk about what it means to be Apostolic in their everyday lives vary based on what kind of talk and practices are acceptable at the local level. The local context is where interaction takes place and people acquire the symbolic resources that make up their cultural repertoires. These repertoires constrain the possibly of certain talk and action while enable others. Forest Hill supplies its members with a repertoire that expands the possibility of talk and action beyond that enabled by the institutional church by reimagining the boundaries of Apostolic identity.

3.2 Data and Methods

Using Jenkins' (2014) typology of the three distinct orders of experience as a guide, this study explores the relationship between institutional (organizationally established ways of doing and being), contextual (local interaction and discourse), and individual (subjective, cognitive and embodied processes) level boundary and identity processes. This multi-level analysis required a multimethod approach including content analysis, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews. These methods allow me to examine the ways that boundaries and identities are being defined at each level of analysis. The goal of this study is to investigate the ways that these three levels interact with one another by exploring how institutional boundaries are treated at the congregational level and how the institutional and congregational levels affect the individual level.

To capture institutional level processes I examined official organizational documents. Forest Hill is a member of the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI). The UPCI is headquartered in Weldon Spring, Missouri and has its own publishing house, websites, university, minister training, and an annual conference at which all members of affiliated churches are encouraged to attend. In order to identify institutional boundaries, or the official boundaries that signal legitimate Christian identity as defined by the Apostolic church, I analyzed several organizational documents published and released by the UPCI. These documents included magazines, tracts, websites, and the 2017 UPCI Manual. The Manual contains, among other things, official articles of faith, the constitution, and position papers. These documents were analyzed for

themes related to boundary and identity construction to identify specific beliefs and practices that operate as symbolic boundaries for the Apostolic church.

To capture contextual processes I conducted observations at a local congregation. Forest Hill is a congregation with 300-350 regular attendees at two Sunday morning services. It also has Wednesday night services as well as several small groups and other community activities. The congregation is racially and ethnically diverse. According to visual estimates, the racial composition of the congregation appears to be about equal parts black and white with the remainder of Hispanic and Asian origin. To capture boundary and identity processes at the congregational level I conducted 9 months of participant observation. During this time I attended Sunday morning worship services, a new members class series conducted by the pastor, a non-church sponsored event with members, and occasional Wednesday night services totaling over 40 services and events attended. I took field notes in a notebook while at events, often sitting in the back during services so as not to be disruptive. These notes were later typed up and additional commentary related to emerging themes were added resulting in over 200 pages of notes. This allowed me to analyze discourse about boundaries and Apostolic identity at the local level. This is an important part of understanding the construction of boundaries and their effect on identity as the literature suggests that specific structural location affects the repertoires, or the cultural tools and meanings, which people have access to. These observations contribute to our understanding of the effect of contextual factors in meditating between institutional and individual level processes.

To capture individual level processes I conducted interviews with congregation members. A total of 10 interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview

method. The interviewees included 5 males (3 white, 1 black, 1 Hispanic) and 5 females (3 white, 1 black, 1 Hispanic). The sample was collected through a combination convenience and snowball sampling methods. The interview schedule included questions about each respondents conversion narrative, religious/collective identity, outgroups, beliefs, and practices. Interviews were recorded and lasted between one and two hours. Audio files were later transcribed and imported into the qualitative software program NVivo.

Following Rubin and Rubin (2012), interviews were read and summarized. In addition to summaries, they were initially coded for relevant concepts related to the theoretical interest of the project. The different concepts were then organized into major themes. The final coding scheme included the themes "boundaries", "practices", "beliefs" and "religion in everyday life". As these themes in and of themselves were too broad to be meaningful they were divided further into subcategories. The theme "boundaries" concerned excerpts that explicitly or implicitly discussed the construction of boundaries around Apostolic identity. This theme was subdivided into "exclusive" (statements that suggested exclusion), "inclusive" (statements that suggested inclusion), "blurring" (statements that obscured or downplayed boundaries), "outgroups" (groups defined as oppositional to Apostolics), and "spatial-temporal" (statements that suggested differences in boundaries across space or time). The theme "practices" concerned practices people engage in that are related to their Apostolic identity. This was subdivided into "infilling of holy spirit" (statements about the experience and meaning of this event), "baptism" (statements about the experience and meaning of this event), and "lifestyle" (statements about everyday lifestyle choices connected to Apostolic identity). The theme "beliefs"

captured statements related to the beliefs one holds related to being Apostolic. There was overlap between this theme and the "practices" them also resulting in "infilling of the holy spirit" and "baptism" subthemes, but it also included the subtheme "relationship" (statements about the importance of a relationship with God). Finally, the theme "religion in everyday life" contained statements concerning how peoples' faith influences perception in everyday life.

The remainder of this paper will systematically analyze the relationship between the three levels of analysis discussed above. The goal of capturing information at these three separate levels is to investigate the relationship between structure, culture, and agency. Structure in terms of how relations between and within groups affect identities based on their location within the broader field, culture in terms of discourses, beliefs, and practices that are used to construct identities, and agency in terms of how individuals and local communities creatively use available cultural tools to construct identity. In this way, I contribute to scholarly knowledge about how boundaries around the same identity are constructed at different levels.

CHAPTER 4: INSTITUTIONAL BOUNDARIES

The study of boundaries has begun to look more systematically at the ways that institutions categorize, shape, and define identities (Shoshana 2007). As a part of an individual's cultural repertoire, institutions not only define "how things are done" but also "what things are". Institutions pattern not only practices but also aid in categorizing and classifying things in the world (Douglas 1986). They tell people not only what to do but how to think. Formal institutions supply those embedded within them with the repertoires, or tools, they use to act and think with. In interacting and identifying with a formal institution, in this case a denomination, people learn what they do and who they are as members of that group. In defining what we do and who we are they also imply what we do not do and who we are not. Thus, institutions are directly implicated in the construction of the boundaries. The formation of boundaries make identification with a group meaningful because they define what it means to be a member of the group.

The boundaries defined by denominations are most readily identified in their definition of the official beliefs and practices of the church. Agreement with and the embodiment of these beliefs and practices signal that a person identifies with the group and grants them membership within it. These official institutional definitions for membership mark the boundaries between those who can legitimately make claims on an identity and those who cannot. Thus, these definitions help to categorize and classify who belongs and who does not. The following section will examine the Apostolic church's official institutional definitions of what it means to make a legitimate claim on Christian and Apostolic identity.[9] Implicitly throughout these institutional documents is the idea

---

[9] This is done in full recognition that the presentation of membership criteria in official documents is ideal-typical and does not necessarily reflect how members enact Apostolic identity in everyday life. Much

that to be authentically Christian is to be Apostolic and to embody the beliefs and practices prescribed by the Apostolic church as they follow the teachings of the Apostles recorded in the Bible. Thus, in constructing boundaries the denomination is defining what it means to be both authentically Apostolic and authentically Christian.

4.1 Official Institutional Definition of Apostolic Identity

The institutional church is responsible for constructing the boundaries, or symbolic distinctions, that define Apostolic identity. The UPCI is traditionally a fundamentalist and conservative denomination with strong and exclusive boundaries. These strong boundaries can be identified even in the current denominational literature. Though these qualities are not exclusive to the UPCI, Apostolic Pentecostalism has a unique subcultural identity even among other Christian denominations, possessing a core set of beliefs and practices that are specific to their denominational identity. As the construction of identity is relational in nature (Jenkins 2014), the Apostolic church has a range of outgroups, beliefs, and practices both inside and outside of Christianity to define themselves against. These distinctive characteristics are defined both explicitly and implicitly in denominational literature and publications. Though groups can have endless differences with other groups not all differences operate as symbolic boundaries. The following analysis will focus on three characteristics that are distinctive to the Apostolic church: 1. The doctrine of Oneness. 2. The plan of salvation. 3. The holiness standards.

scholarship (Ammerman 2003, 2007) recognizes that institutional definitions of religious identity reify religious categories and do not necessarily reflect how people embody their religious beliefs and practices in everyday life. This paper aligns itself with these findings and ultimately seeks to further support them by systematically evaluating the differences between official and everyday definitions and by exploring what factors might influence variation between them.

4.1.1 The Doctrine of Oneness

The doctrine of Oneness is unique to Apostolics and another small subset of Pentecostals. The doctrine of Oneness is an opposition to the belief in a Triune God, or the trinity. The trinity is the doctrine that there are three separate persons in one God - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – and is a foundational doctrine for most of Christendom. Apostolics, however, believe that God does not have distinct persons but is wholly one. This doctrine can be found through UPCI literature which makes implicit and explicit references to it. One notable location is its presence on the first page of every publication of the UPCI's official magazine, *The Pentecostal Herald*, under the title "The One True God". The text is as follows:

> We believe in the one ever-living, eternal God: infinite in power, holy in nature, attributes, and purpose; and possessing absolute, indivisible deity. This one true God has revealed Himself as Father; through His Son, in redemption; and as the Holy Spirit, by emanation (I Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:6; II Corinthians 5:19; Joel 2:28).

While an initial reading of the text may not seem unique, this doctrine is a major symbolic distinction between the Apostolic church and other forms of Christian faith. The title of this statement implies that a correct understanding of God is that he is not divided but one, marking a boundary of belief for those who profess Apostolic identity. This doctrine is given further treatment in the *2017 UPCI Manual* where it is the third of twenty six sections under the "Articles of Faith" preceded only by the "Preamble" and the "Fundamental Doctrine". The doctrine is also found in other forms throughout the institutional literature including being the subject of the editorial page of the January 2017 issue of *The Pentecostal Herald* where the importance of maintaining the doctrine was discussed. It is also the subject of an institutional tract entitled "60 Questions on the

Godhead with Bible Answers" in which an argument is made against the trinity and for

Oneness using scriptural passages. Taken as a whole, this belief constitutes a fundamental

symbolic distinction between Apostolics and other forms of Christian faith. This belief,

however, is not the only distinguishing aspect of Apostolic faith.

4.1.2 The Plan of Salvation

Another unique set of beliefs of the Apostolic church are those relating to

salvation. Within Christendom as a whole there are a number of views concerning what is

necessary for one to become a true believer and obtain salvation. Even amidst broader

controversies concerning this issue, the Apostolic church holds a unique set of beliefs

regarding salvation that make it symbolically distinct from other forms of Christianity.

The church has a threefold approach to the process of salvation, these include: 1.

Repentance 2. Baptism in Jesus name for the remission of sins 3. The infilling of the

Holy Ghost with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues. The church's official

statement concerning this process, as found in the church manual and at the beginning of

every magazine publication, is titled the "Fundamental Doctrine". The text is as follows:

> The basic and fundamental doctrine of this organization shall be the *Bible standard of full
> salvation*, which is repentance, baptism in water by immersion in the name of the Lord Jesus
> Christ for the remission of sins, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the initial sign of speaking
> with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance. We shall endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit
> until we all come into the unity of the faith, at the same time *admonishing all brethren that they
> shall not contend for their different views* to the disunity of the body. (Emphasis added)

This text draws a symbolic boundary between the Apostolic church's practices

concerning salvation and others by legitimizing the Apostolic method as the proper

method outlined by the Bible, the "Bible standard". It also cautions against holding

alternative views concerning the issue. While the individual parts of the approach may

not be unique to the Apostolic church, combined the three parts make a distinct set of

practices concerning salvation. Further expositions of these practices are found in

denominational tracts which outline the reasons for and importance of each of these three

practices. Even when it is not the main subject of a tract, many tracts conclude by stating

why it is important to practice this threefold process of salvation. This repetition and

emphasis can be interpreted as demonstrating the symbolic importance of this process to

Apostolic identity.

4.1.3 The Holiness Standards

The final area of symbolic distinction for the Apostolic church concerns the

holiness standards. The holiness standards are lifestyle practices that members are

expected to engage in and refrain from. These practices are rooted in the Holiness

Movement of the early 20th century which was based on the idea that Christians should

live "holy" lives that distinguished them from the rest of the world (Synan 1997). While

some of the very traditional ideas that spawned from this movement are still practiced by

some Christians outside the UPCI, there is only a small minority who do so making this a

symbolically distinct practice within Christianity at large. The church's official stance

concerning these issues is stated as follows:

> We wholeheartedly disapprove of our people indulging in any activities which are not conducive
> to good Christianity and godly living, such as theaters, dances, mixed bathing or swimming,
> women cutting their hair, make-up, any apparel that immodestly exposes the body, all worldly
> sports and amusements, and unwholesome radio programs and music. Furthermore, because of the
> display of all these evils on television, we disapprove of any of our people having television sets
> in their homes. We admonish all of our people to refrain from any of these practices in the interest
> of spiritual progress and the soon coming of the Lord for His church. (From the *2017 UPCI
> Manual*)

The language of "wholehearted disapproval" suggests that the institutional church

is drawing a strong boundary concerning these practices. The path to embody legitimate

Apostolic identity is to refrain from these practices. According to the institutional church, in order to be authentically Apostolic one must lead a lifestyle devoid of these practices. As alluded to in many of the practices listed above, an important component for holy living as defined by the institutional church are issues of modesty and the performance of gender. The majority of these specific practices such as not cutting hair and not wearing make-up or jewelry fall on women as the church wants to "please God and represent our gender clearly and practically" (2017 UPCI Manual). Further explication of these issues outline that, "Our women wear skirts or dresses and do not wear pants." Taken together, the holiness standards are important practices and boundaries that signify Apostolic identity. Not only do these practices signify legitimate Apostolic identity but also imply that they are necessary for authentic Christian faith.

4.2 Summary of Institutional Boundaries

The boundaries drawn by the institutional church are the official material from which an ideal-typical form of Apostolic identity is created. In these documents the church is defining what it means to be Apostolic and classifying who belongs to the category Apostolic by outlining what it means to make a claim on that identity. They outline which beliefs and practices members of the Apostolic church are to hold and embody. The belief in the doctrine of Oneness, the unique plan of salvation, and the practice of holiness standards are major symbolic distinctions that separate Apostolic faith and lifestyle from other groups and identities more broadly but also from other forms of Christianity as well. The exclusive and definitive language used in these documents implicitly suggest that alternative forms and expression of Christian faith are

not legitimate, or at least do not correctly follow the Bible's outline for a true Christian doctrine and lifestyle.

Presumably these symbolic boundaries would operate as markers that signify legitimate Apostolic identity and membership in the group. Residing on the outside of these boundaries (i.e. not holding these beliefs or following these practices) locates a person outside of legitimate Apostolic identity. The following sections will explore how this ideal-typical construction of Apostolic identity and institutional boundaries aligns with everyday discourse at the congregational and individual levels. Besides building upon established research that demonstrates that there is variation between institutional definitions religious identity and everyday definitions (Ammerman 2003, Sherkat 2003), the following sections suggest that the degree to which these boundaries are made salient in daily lives of individual members is dependent upon local discourse and enforcement.

CHAPTER 5: CONGREGATIONAL BOUNDARIES

Boundaries scholars have long observed the importance of structural context in the shaping of boundaries and "particularly by the cultural repertoires, traditions, and narratives that individuals have access to" (Lamont and Molnar 2002:171). While official institutional classification systems concerning membership are certainly not inconsequential in constructing boundaries and identity – indeed denominations are important agents of religious socialization (Sherkat 2003) – the repertoires, traditions, and narratives that people have access to are acquired at the interactional level. Discourse at the local, congregational level can have a major impact on the way in which people define issues and construct boundaries and identities which may be decoupled from "official" discourse (Edgell 2003:177). Thus, the local context is where people acquire the cultural tools to construct their identity as Apostolic.

The UPCI is a historically conservative denomination with very distinctive traits as discussed earlier. Shifts in the religious field as well as cultural shifts more broadly have posed a challenge for the distinctiveness of Apostolic beliefs and practices, just as they have in Christianity more broadly (Smith 1999). Forest Hill faces a unique challenge in preserving its core Apostolic identity while maintaining relevance in a rapidly changing world. Many leaders and congregants at Forest Hill recognize this challenge. They acknowledge that even within the Apostolic church there are different approaches to negotiating the boundaries around what it means to be Apostolic. One way they do this is by drawing conservative-liberal distinctions between congregations and individuals. The inclusive public discourse at Forest Hill as well as lay discourse concerning conservative-liberal distinctions suggest that the greater the normative pressures at the

local level to adhere to and embody the institutional boundaries, the closer the discourse and individual expressions of Apostolic identity align with official definitions.

While not on the level of Wuthnow's (2005:143) "inclusive Christians" who take a pluralistic approach to religion by claiming that all forms of faith are legitimate, the discourse at Forest Hill routinely included themes of inclusion and acceptance of difference. These themes are undergirded by the practice of self-reflective boundary work, or reminders not to think of oneself or community as superior to others. Not only was discourse concerning institutional boundaries virtually nonexistent at the local level, there were many efforts to reduce emphasis on the importance of boundaries in the creation of community at Forest Hill. Thus, in addition to self-reflective boundary work, there are several boundary blurring discourses present at Forest Hill.

5.1 Local Engagement with Institutional Boundaries

Public discourse at Forest Hill included very little engagement with official institutional boundaries. While the practice of many of the things that make Apostolic identity unique such as dress codes, baptism, and speaking in tongues was evident in public gatherings they were almost entirely absent from talk. When they were mentioned, they were never discussed in terms of their importance, essentiality, or moral significance to Apostolic or Christian identity. They were never framed as morally superior to other forms of faith or practice but as practices meant to be personally meaningful experiences and expressions of faith.

Though implicit in the expression "in Jesus name" that is consistently used in public discourse, the doctrine of Oneness was never explicitly mentioned. Though the

pastor made it clear that the newcomers class was not a systematic theology of the church, the topic of Oneness was not even mentioned as a defining part of Apostolic identity. Of the three parts of the salvation process, the importance of repentance and living a Christian lifestyle receives consistent treatment at the public level but baptism and speaking in tongues were never discussed as vital to legitimate Christian or Apostolic identity. This emphasis on repentance was the only clear boundary drawing process as the church seeks to distinguish itself from other imagined Christians who take a "once saved always saved" approach to faith that allows them to claim Christian identity without practicing a corresponding lifestyle. Additionally, the holiness standards are given little attention and not treated as hard and fast boundaries concerning Apostolic identity. While it may not be extraordinary that these topics rarely enter the public discourse, it is notable that much of the discourse was strategically countering the symbolic and social exclusion that the official institutional boundaries might inspire. As will be discussed below, this local construction of Apostolic identity and de-emphasis on institutional boundaries is not the typical expression across time and space.

5.2 Local Collective Identity

Rather than talk that focused on differentiating the group and drawing boundaries around appropriate beliefs and practices, public discourse at Forest Hill often included themes of self-reflection and inclusion. Instead, discourse focused heavily on the idea that, as individuals, they have the power and presence of God in their lives to see them through trying and difficult circumstances. This is not to say that active boundary work was not at all at play as this is an inevitable process in the construction of group identity

even among groups with an inclusive orientation (Yukich 2010). Rather, there was very little construction of and no clear outgroups besides a religious "other" who is an imagined person or group that uses their faith to exclude others, tout their own righteousness, and/or live how they please. This religious "other" operates as a foil against which congregation members can define themselves to take on an inclusive identity.

Pastor Daniel places very little emphasis on official institutional boundaries and the treatment they are given typically blurs them and expands the possibilities of what it means to be Apostolic. In the new Christian class he repeatedly mentions that Forest Hill desires to be a church based on love, acceptance, and inclusion. He says they are not in the "business of division" but of bringing people together. Quoting Marx and Engels he says they do not desire to be a "control mechanism for the masses". He also repeats themes of individual choice in one's life of faith and champions "influence" over control or dictates. The theme of non-judgment was also common and Pastor Daniel even gave specific reminders that people do not decide who is a good person, who loves God, or who is saved.

5.2.1 Self-Reflective Boundary Work

Themes of self-reflection run through much of the public discourse at Forest Hill. Rather than spending time constructing the image of the group itself as positively distinct and superior to others as certain predictions of social identity theory might suggest (Tajfel and Turner 1986), the pastor attempts to create a group culture that is wary of perceiving itself as superior to others. This is often accomplished through the

construction of the imagined religious "other" which members are warned against becoming. This other is unnamed and not connected to any specific groups but operates to get congregation members to reflect on their own thoughts and actions. This is commonly done by calling on the image of the Pharisees, antagonists to Jesus in the Gospel narratives who are portrayed as being concerned with rule following, being self-righteous and judgmental, and excluding others. In referencing a biblical story in which the Pharisees are about to stone a woman for committing adultery, the pastor says "we want to be the people who drop the stone and say it's not my place". Not only does the pastor warn them against becoming this type of person or group but he also occasionally reminds them that they *are* that person from time to time and consequently should not be quick to judge even those people who act in this manner.

Pastor Daniel also spoke of "tribalizing the Gospel" and the necessity of the church's role to be an agent of reconciliation. In his discussion of tribalization, he points to people's tendency – and specifically for "us fundamentalist preachers" – to condemn those they view as sinners using a "religious veneer". He then goes on to cite a passage of scripture in which the apostle Paul "gives this tremendous list of transgressions and then says that the person who's inexcusable is the one who judges these people". In his series on reconciliation he aims to seek to understand how the concept "applies to us in a local church". He speaks of reconciliation as a coming together of people who "look different, think different, act different" and that the church's testimony to the world is the manifestation of this type of reconciliation. He also goes on to say: "I'm scared of a church that looks like me, that votes like me, that thinks like me – that's not reconciliation…We've got to embrace, we've got to reconcile, we've got to have

empathy, we need to be a place of inclusion." As will be discussed below, this manifests itself at Forest Hill not only in macro level differences such as race and socioeconomic status but in different expressions of Apostolic identity itself. Themes of non-judgement and acceptance of difference were also located in a number of other pastoral discourses.

I propose that this is a special kind of boundary work in which a community is encouraged not to get lost in its taken-for-granted way of seeing the world that can be thought of a "self-reflective" boundary work. Instead, they are encouraged to critically reexamine how they evaluate the goodness of both themselves and others. This could serve to soften negative moral evaluations and weaken the relative strength of boundaries between the self or the group and others. This is similar to but different from Shoshana's (2007) "reverse boundary work" in which group members are encouraged to positively evaluate the characteristics of an outgroup and devalue characteristics of the ingroup. However, rather than being encouraged to devalue any specific characteristics of the ingroup they are encouraged simply not to overvalue themselves or their group and also not to devalue others or other groups.

5.2.2 Inclusion and Blurring Institutional Boundaries

The practice of self-reflective boundary work seems to be part of a larger project of creating an inclusive community at Forest Hill. Social exclusion follows symbolic exclusion, both of which are the products of boundary drawing (Lamont and Molnar 2002). By blurring the symbolic distinctions, or weakening the strength of symbolic boundaries, that mark Apostolic identity the definition of the category "Apostolic" becomes more expansive and able to include expressions outside of the official

institutional boundaries at Forest Hill. Thus, in reducing symbolic exclusion it simultaneously increases social inclusion. Unlike Edward's (Hispanic, male) first experience with an Apostolic church in California where he recalls thinking, "Man, I'm not even baptized yet, why are you telling me what kind of pants I can wear?" Forest Hill tries to create a community in which people are accepted wherever they are at in their faith without rigidly enforcing institutional boundaries. Rather than being requirements for membership in the group, some official institutional boundaries such as the holiness standards are framed as "matters of the heart" based on an individual's personal relationship with God. Using this logic, membership in the community is not based on a binary logic of residing on one side of the boundary or the other but placed on a horizontal, rather than vertical and hierarchical, continuum.

Unlike conferences, where Linda (white, female) says they go into "tremendous detail of why it's essential for a woman to [follow the standards]", the only public discussion of this issue during my observations was during the newcomers class. Contrary to an exposition on the essential nature of this and other holiness practices, Pastor Daniel recognizes that the holiness standards are often seen as a form of "exclusion" and reassures people that everyone is welcome in their community. He estimates that about a third of the congregation follows all the holiness standards, a third follow many, and a third follow some but wants "everyone to know they have a place here". Instead of applying the standards as impermeable boundaries that constitute inclusion or exclusion in the community he reframes them as matters of the heart that do not determine how good a person is or how much they love God. He encourages people to adopt these if they are personally meaningful in their relationship to God, not because

they are following someone else's rules, saying that it "has to be your worship, then it's

beautiful". In the new members class as well as in many sermons given during the time of

my fieldwork Pastor Daniel consistently echoed the sentiment that "man looks at the

outward appearance, God looks at the heart". In saying these things he blurs the

boundaries around Apostolic identity by symbolically and socially including people in

the community even if they reside outside of official institutional boundaries concerning

the practice of the holiness standards.

5.3 Spatial-Temporal Differences in Boundaries

Interviews and conversations with congregants and leaders during my field work

revealed that expression of Apostolic identity and the enforcement of official institutional

boundaries varies over time and space. Forest Hill does not typify the average Apostolic

congregation. This supports scholarship that suggests that context matters in how identity

is constructed and boundaries are drawn (Lamont and Molnar 2002), particularly in

religious contexts (Ammerman 2003). This case demonstrates this to be true even in

formal institutions with historically strong boundaries. Several congregants expressed this

reality by making a conservative-liberal distinction between churches within the

denomination itself. Josh (black, male) offers an elaborated typology concerning these

two types of churches and styles of leadership:

> So there's two types of people in the church: there's those who are influential and those who are
> dictators...People who are influential are usually considered the "liberals" and those who are
> dictators are usually considered the "conservatives". So: "This is the way it's gonna be, this is how
> it's gonna be. If you don't like it, well, you can find somewhere else to go." Those are the
> dictators… I don't say it to be negative. It's just their leadership style. I should probably say
> "authoritarian". That's, that's a better word. So, the people who base their leadership style off of
> influence, meaning: "Well, this is the way I'm gonna live and I wanna live in a way, and I wanna
> preach in a way, I wanna talk in a way where other people will follow suit. But if they don't, it's
> not my job to try to force them to do anything they don't want to do. All I can do is try to convince

them."…. So, if the pastor of the church…is influential then differing standards won't offend them becuase they're gonna view it as: "We're gonna love everybody no matter what: A. And B: people are on different paths or in different stages of their journey." And then, if you're more of a authoritarian leader then its like: "This is the standard, this is the minimum. And everyone-, we want everyone to be unified in this to aviod confusion." So, both have their pros and cons. But it all depends on the individual personality and leadership style of those in the church.

Forest Hill would undoubtedly fall on the liberal side of this spectrum as several other congregants suggested. Thomas (white, male) recalls his childhood church saying, "In the heat of the summer when its 105 degrees playing softball or volleyball out in the yard, I'd be in hot sweaty jeans…the approach I take today is if its 105 degrees, I'm going to be wearing some shorts." Similarly, speaking of the first Apostolic congregation he attended, Edward recalls: "When I first started going to church I only wore long sleeve shirts, I had no facial hair, I didn't have long hair, and I dressed in a white shirt and a tie almost everyday." He goes on to say that Forest Hill is not this way and has experienced numerical growth since the pastor took over, unlike churches who have continued in the conservative vein. He believes the church is starting to see that "we have to love these people because that's what's gonna bring them back, not all these laws about this, that, and the other." Other respondents also expressed differences in practice and expectations between congregations. For example, Linda goes into more detail concerning differences in the practice of holiness standards:

> [The standards have] to do with how you look on the outside. And those are the ones that people can see. So inward stuff is also taught, but it's -- it depends on where you go. It depends on what church you visit. So, as you know, there are many, many oneness Apostolic organizations that fellowship together. But for the conservative majority, and I say conservative meaning not like in few, they're the majority of people that are conservative in their beliefs, they teach much more specifically on the outward and following signs on the outside that look a certain part.

Also commenting on whether Apostolics all believe and practice the same things, Tina says: "I thought so at one point, but I'm not sure that everyone has had the same

training…where I grew up and what I learned I thought that's what all of them did, but I

don't know." Andy expands on this by addressing not only spatial differences but

temporal and contextual ones as well:

> I think there's definately a uniqness to the lifestyle. Nowadays it doesn't seem to be quite as predominant. But I think it's still echoed and preached a lot, especially at conferences and stuff like that. But, generally speaking, Apostolic Pentecostals have a standard of holiness that's preached in some manner, shape, form… but at the same time, nowadays, I know a lot, a lot of people that, they're gonna go watch football after church, they don't see much problem with that. And nowadays this circle, while they still kind of preach it, the main idea more is if its in your heart to not watch anything on TV, well God bless you, don't watch anything on TV. But if wanna go watch football game, God bless you. Use good sense.

As Andy notes in the quote above, conferences serve as a ritual that reaffirms the

collective identity of the group that closely aligns with the official institutional

boundaries (Hermanowicz and Morgan 1999). As alluded to in the other quotes above

and by other respondents, certain congregations may enact this model of reaffirming

boundaries on a regular basis which would create conditions for the construction of

strong boundaries and exclusive practices. Linda explains how in the congregation she

grew up in she was taught that they had "full truth" and everyone else had "half truths"

but has since called into question this type of thinking. As Edward's experience with his

first church demonstrates, other congregations draw strong boundaries around practices

in addition to beliefs. However, this does not seem to be the model at Forest Hill were the

collective identity that is ritually reaffirmed is one that advocates for a culture of

inclusion that expands official institutional boundaries.

5.4 Congregational Boundaries and Collective Identity Conclusion

Rather than seeking to be a community based on distinction and difference, Forest

Hill strives for a collective identity based on love, acceptance, and inclusion. These

"liberal" tendencies create a space for variation in belief and practice amongst members of the congregation with some choosing more traditional expressions while others venture outside the more highly defined institutional boundaries. This is supported by the practice of self-reflective boundary work that discourages judging and thinking of the self or group as superior to others. Rather than treating the doctrine of Oneness, the salvation process, and the holiness standards as vital moral boundaries concerning inclusion in Apostolic identity and community, they are treated as personally meaningful belief and practices that are part of a developing and personally crafted faith. Public discourse encourages the acceptance of any and all people no matter where they are in this development. They are not beliefs and practices imposed by the community but are rather supplied by the community. Within certain limits, individuals can chose to adopt or not to adopt these practices.

CHAPTER 6: INDIVIDUAL BOUNDARIES

The construction of identity and boundaries at the individual level combined elements from both the institutional and congregational levels. Themes from both levels emerged in the talk of the interviewees. Respondents deployed official institutional boundaries in their discussions of defining characteristics of Apostolic identity. However, they also engaged in self-reflective boundary work that was found at the congregational level. In addition, they engaged in boundary blurring discourses that opened space for the possibility of authentic Christian identity outside of the Apostolic church as well as authentic Apostolic identity without embodying traditional Apostolic practices. These blurring strategies were undergirded by a discourse of personalism that emphasized personal experience as well as the autonomy of the individual in developing their personal relationship with God.

6.1 Defining Apostolic Identity Using Institutional Boundaries

Respondents used the institutional boundaries to define their personal identity as Apostolic but were reluctant to assert these beliefs and practices as the only possible form of legitimate Christian faith. Rather than assert the boundaries as impermeable, several respondents cite them as models given in the Bible without explicitly delegitimizing other forms or expression of faith. Accordingly, these beliefs and practices are infused with personal meaning and significance as they are interpreted as the fulfillment of biblical guidance. Thus, the institutionally defined beliefs and practices that demarcate Apostolic identity are integral to their own sense of Christian identity without denying the

possibility of others. This is typified in Tina's (white, female) discussion on salvation in which she mirrors institutional boundaries but leaves other possibilities open:

> I'm not going to say you can't be saved without it but I think God is pretty clear that he wants us to repent and turn away from our sins and that he wants us to be baptized because that remits our sins and [to do it] in the name of Jesus. That applies his name to our lives, that's how we get his name that we can be taken up into heaven to be with him. And to receive the promise of the Holy Ghost, with the evidence of speaking in tongues, because that's your power, that's your strength, to be here and to be a witness and to live a godly life.

Here there is a clear and direct connection between the everyday construction of identity and institutional boundaries. Tina, and others, reaffirm the importance of the three steps of the salvation process to both Apostolic identity and their own personal religious identity. These practices hang together to create a cosmology, or personal order (Shoshana 2007), for everyday life. Forsaking one's sin through repentance and being baptized allows one to be forgiven and receiving the infilling proves that the Holy Ghost is living inside of you. Together they reaffirm that one can (through forgiveness) and has (by the evidence of the infilling) entered into proper relationship with God as found in the biblical model constructed by the institutional church. Possessing the Holy Ghost gives one the "power" and "strength" to face the troubles and trials of life and live in a Christian manner. Several other respondents also discussed the power one has as a result of receiving the Holy Ghost. This seems to become a lens through which congregants view and interpret events in everyday life.

Andy, like many others, speaks of both his baptism and infilling as special experiences and defining moments in his personal walk of faith. Speaking of being baptized in Jesus name after already having been baptized in other modes before Andy says, "Well now it's been an experience those - it was different. It was like this cleansing. It was this experience that I had." Similarly John says of his infilling: "When that

experience happened I was like: 'Man, it is all real, it's all real.'…The Word was confirmed when that happened." The practices that accompany the belief system provided by the institutional church become personally meaningful experiences that confirm the legitimacy of those beliefs. However, rather than outright symbolically excluding those who do not follow this model they find personal meaning and security in their adherence to it as it affirms their personal connection to God.

While the elements of the plan of salvation outlined by the institutional church was brought up in some form by every respondent as a vital part of Apostolic identity, its necessity for authentic Christian identity was less clear. Rather respondents often suggested that the true building blocks of Christian faith were the daily practices that constitute one's relationship with God such as reading the Bible and prayer. Several respondents expressed the idea, reminiscent of what Pastor Daniel says, that they are not judge but God is and it is he who decides who has a relationship with him. While the quote above demonstrates the important role these practices play in Tina's own faith she later echoes all these ideas as she discusses Christians outside the Apostolic tradition saying: "It's just basically a relationship with God, if they're walking close to God and spending time with him and in his word, they're on the right track, if they're not there already, you know what I mean? God is the final judge, not me."

The holiness standards were brought up by all respondents. Most respondents recognized this as the most defining, as well as the most contested, feature of Apostolic identity. During my observations I noticed that while the majority of women did not wear pants some did, particularly outside of church services. I also observed at least one congregant cut her long hair to shoulder length. In many interviews respondents

explained why it was or was not important for them as individuals to follow these rules. Explanations by those who choose not to follow them showed respect for those that do and those who did choose to follow them cited personal benefit or belief as their reason for doing so. Carla discusses the personal importance for her to not cut her hair in accordance with the institutional practice:

> I know they say the longer it is the glory it is, but I think that if you just respect it and never trim-, and [the Bible] even says "don't cut, don't trim it". I should say there's people that do it either way but as for me I want that relationship with him…I believe the glory of his hair.

Carla recognizes that not all women follow the practice. However, for her, the practice is an integral part of her relationship with God.

Interpreting how important the doctrine of Oneness is to individual's definition of Apostolic identity was the most difficult of all the institutional boundaries. Only four out of ten respondents even mentioned this as a distinguishing feature of Apostolic identity during the course of the interviews. Two of them recognized this belief as a major and important difference between Apostolics and other types of Christians. Speaking about this topic Josh says: "That's very, very big… That's a fundamental dividing factor between us and a lot of other people." Despite Josh's emphatic discussion and as well as a few comments by others, the majority of respondents neglected to make any mention of it. I do not take this silence to mean that this is not important to congregants but the difference between the institutional emphasis and those of individuals is notable.

6.2 Defining Identity Using Congregational Boundaries

As previously stated, context plays an important role in how boundaries and identities are constructed. The relationship between everyday talk and congregational

discourse was evident in a number of interviews. The self-reflective boundary work and boundary blurring discourse at Forest Hill occurred not only at the public level but at the individual level as well. Several of the respondents even directly spoke of the influence public discourse has on them as individuals. Capturing the essence of this dynamic, Andy draws a direct connection between patterns of thinking in the congregants and Pastor Daniel's preaching about being an inclusive community:

> The congregation starts to pick it up, its weird, its almost like its automatic. Its not - because the pastor's preaching on it over and over again - but, ya know, its almost like the church people decided to be that way themselves. Really, I think that the pastor's influencing through preaching and - pastor does a really good job about preaching love people, ya know, love people. Love 'em despite their differences and give because the way to real blessing - real blessing - is to give.

6.2.1 Self-Reflective Boundary Work

The phenomenon of self-reflective boundary work was not only located in the public discourse at Forest Hill but was also reflected at the individual level as well. While this link might not be causal, there is certainly a correlation between the way individuals talked about themes of self-reflection and the way those themes were discussed at the public level. Respondents were hesitant to make definitive and absolute claims, demonstrated respect for alternative points of view, and discussed the possibility of their own understanding being incorrect. When discussing his overall philosophy on Christianity, Thomas offers the following reflection that specifically connects ideas of self-reflection to the pastor's preaching:

> Stay humble, give back, love others, trust God, don't judge - don't judge. I mean if you look at just Jesus and how much time he spent, he spent a lot of time with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the religious people. And I think a lot of religion, they read that and say, yep, that's exactly right, in our world, you know, [the Pharisees are] the Lutherans and the Catholics and this or that. They don't even look in their own house or vice versa, the Catholics say that's the Pentecostals or that's them folks. They don't ever say what if he's talking to me. Do I have the mirror up? Turn the mirror. I think Pastor Daniel's preaching has been big time on that.

Carla also echoes sentiments of the need for humility and a self-critical approach to the group:

> I don't consider myself better, or holier, or "I'm a Christian"…because you never know, God could come and be like: "Your church was bad. You're not going." [Laughs]

Several respondents discussed differences between how they thought in the past or while in different congregations and how they think now. Many of these differences reflect a previously taken for granted way of viewing the world about what right or necessary concerning what it meant to be Christian. Many respondents now take a more reflective approach to their previously taken for granted assumptions. Recalling, with an appreciative respect, how she was trained to think in her previous congregation and how Pastor Daniel's preaching has influenced her, Linda says:

> Pastor's had this whole judgment series going on – justice, I should say – and it's been speaking to me so much because that had been a huge part of my personality just because we were taught to call black black and white white …And so I'm finding out that is not the way that the early church as Christians operated, not the healthy ones at least. And so I'm still learning and I'm finding it fascinating all of the things that I've missed over the years…Whereas before I literally – it's so arrogant – I remember thinking I know all the stories in the Bible, so I know all there is to know.

Thomas further reflects on the dangers of taking for granted assumptions about one's correctness:

> I think people that think they've got it all figured out better be very careful. Sometimes I even struggle with my own heritage because at times I think we can easily think we've got it figured out, that's what grandpa did, that's what grandma did, and this is what I better do.

Certainly, themes of self-reflection at the individual level could simply be the result of individual differences in the private lives of respondents. However, the explicit connection some respondents make to Pastor Daniel's preaching lends support to the view that local discourse plays a role in how individuals conduct boundary work. If the public discourse does not change how individuals conduct boundary work, it at least

creates a culture where this type of talk is legitimated by local authority. Questioning the superiority of one's traditions and ways of thinking and acting in the world does not mean to devalue them but to keep from being "Pharisees" and thinking that one has it "all figured out".

6.2.2 Inclusion and Blurring Institutional Boundaries

As already somewhat discussed in the sections above, respondents often blurred the boundaries constructed at the institutional level and engaged in a discourse of inclusion. A discourse of personalism that created space for people to have different levels of commitment or modes of practice was also present. Respondent blurred boundaries around what it means to be authentically Christian concerning salvation and what is means to be authentically Apostolic concerning the holiness standards. While growing up in an environment that strictly followed the standards, Thomas now has a different take on their necessity and importance:

> While I grew up in a very traditional what I'd call practice of standards, things to do, I don't -- I don't put myself over in that category to that level. And my philosophy, right or wrong, is I believe what's in the heart is most important and God made all of us unique.

Later he goes on to that his approach is not always received well by other Apostolics: "As you can tell, I'm not lock step in line with what I'd say are very traditional holiness Pentecostal people. And some of them would say about me, 'You've strayed outside the fence'. I've had them say it." Thomas reports that it is not an attitude that is universal amongst all Apostolics, however, this philosophy of personalism is given support in the public discourse at Forest Hill as well as amongst other respondents. Further supporting

ideas about personalism and the importance of not socially excluding those do not adhere to all the rules Josh says:

> So, there's different levels of commitment in Christianity and, from my perspective, that's okay. That' okay. We're not gonna push people away cause they're not on the field. But there are people that do do that. But like I said, for the most part, I haven't seen that in many many years.

Themes of respecting difference and inclusion were not only concerning differences between Apostolics but between Apostolics and other Christians as well. Expanding the possibility of being authentically Christian outside of the Apostolic identity blurs the boundaries set by the institution. Echoing themes of love and the importance of personal relationship, John says this about division between denominations:

> I think we fail by dividing us by denomination. We all have a relationship…Being Apostolic [we are] trying to live by the example of the Word. And others can say that too. So it's a real fine respect. It's just being careful of putting division but never forsaking loving thy neighbor…we are all a melting pot that God loves and respecting people's differences…not that they are right or wrong but that's simply where they're at.

Not only did respondents show a respect for difference outside of the Apostolic church they also symbolically included them by suggesting their authenticity. This inclusion reflected themes of God as judge and personalism as grounds for having an authentic relationship with God. Thomas says of being authentically Christian: "Tell me about your life. Give me a snapshot of a month following you around and I'll tell you if you're a Christian or I won't tell you, but God will let you know." Speaking on her expectations of who will receive salvation, Linda says:

> I used to think that heaven was going to look like a UPC church…Then I got to a point where I thought: "Okay, well, it's going to be a bit broader than that." I now feel like it's going to be much more broad in terms of God is the judge, I'm not the judge…what I now see is there is much more flexibility and room for other people to be grafted into the body of Christ than just my one group of-, that I've had experience with. Other people are getting it right too…the things that certain Oneness Apostolic churches teach is a very, very, very, very narrow path. I feel much more narrow than what even God is saying.

Speaking of actual, rather than abstract, people she knows outside of the Apostolic

church, Cindy says:

> I just feel like I've met other people that I know are Spirit-filled that don't go to a Pentecostal
> church, the same kind that I went to. I feel like that can be a false sense of comfort for some
> people: I feel like this is truth, so I go to this church, and I'm covered. I feel like, just because you
> go to an Apostolic church, that's not your ticket to heaven.

These comments certainly mark a deviation from the institutionally established

boundaries concerning how one receives the Holy Spirit. Together these quotes

demonstrate strategies of boundary blurring conducted by congregation members in their

everyday definitions of Apostolic and Christian identity.

6.3 Individual Boundaries Conclusion

Respondents used the beliefs and practices set as boundaries at the institutional

level to construct their own personal religious identity. However, respondents also

engaged in a number of boundary blurring and inclusive discourses that echoed ideas of

personalism and self-reflection found at the congregational level. This combination

resulted in much greater permeability for the boundaries constructed at the individual

level than those at the institutional level. The following section will examine the

implications these findings have for the study of boundaries and religious identity.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Recap of Boundary Interactions at Different Levels

This study examines boundary and identity construction at the institutional, local, and individual levels. This section will review, summarize, and synthesize the previous analysis of these three levels.

Beside the allusion in the phrase "in Jesus name", there were no ritual affirmations of the Oneness doctrine at Forest Hill and less than half of respondents mentioned it in interviews. Oneness is a belief that demarcates Apostolics from almost all other Christian groups and yet received little treatment at the local and individual levels. While it is likely the case that respondents would affirm its importance if asked directly, the fact that it is such a distinguishing characteristic but receives such little attention is notable. While operating as a distinguishing characteristic, the belief's function as a boundary that delegitimizes other forms of faith was not present during my observations. It is, however, unclear whether this is a function of it being downplayed at Forest Hill or whether it is so taken for granted that it need not be mentioned. Either way it was not deployed as strong boundary in discourse at Forest Hill as it was in institutional documents.

At least some, in many cases all, elements of the process of salvation were mentioned by every respondent. This process was highlighted as an important characteristic of the Apostolic faith as well as being a formative personal experience in the narratives and faith lives of respondents. The institutional definition of this boundary limited the possibility of alternative ways of entering into proper relationship with God

and discouraged members from suggesting otherwise. While certainly the strongest

boundary placed around what it means to be Apostolic and vital to individuals'

understanding of their own faith, respondents were less emphatic about its necessity for

authentic Christian identity. Instead, they emphasized the importance of a personal

relationship with God through more generic practices such Bible study and prayer. Even

at Forest Hill those who had not had these experiences were not excluded from

community participation but were accepted for where they were in their faith.

The holiness standards are where the greatest amount of boundary blurring

occurred, specifically concerning what it means to be Apostolic. It is in this domain that

local and individual discourse at Forest Hill expanded the definition of what it means to

be Apostolic. While the institution set strong boundaries around the types of behaviors

and practices that are appropriate for Apostolics, Forest Hill had a more permissive

approach to setting those boundaries. A discourse of personalism that framed decisions as

"matters of the heart" and advocated for the inclusion of everyone no matter their choice

to follow particular traditions expanded the institutional definition of being Apostolic.

While many congregants still follow the holiness standards because they find them

personally meaningful and edifying they do not symbolically or socially exclude those

who do not. The symbolic and social inclusion of new forms of being Apostolic

experienced by members of Forest Hill is, according to respondents, not the common

model in many other Apostolic churches.

While Apostolic identity is being redefined to some degree at Forest Hill this

redefinition is incremental and still maintains the identity's distinguishing features.

Authentic Apostolic identity is maintained by holding core characteristics as defining

characteristics of one's personal faith but these same components that make Apostolic identity unique are not deployed as moral boundaries that make being Apostolic superior. A belief in the doctrine of Oneness, following the plan of salvation, and (for many) adhering to holiness standards are vital to one's own faith and religious identity but the inclusive discourse at Forest Hill kept them from becoming barriers that delegitimize alternative expressions of faith.

This case demonstrates that beliefs and practices that are defining of one's religious identity do not also have to operate as symbolic and social boundaries that inspire exclusion. Rather they can become boundaries, or defining and distinguishing characteristics, of one's personal religious identity without categorically excluding those who are not part of their identity group. Discursive emphasis on personalism eschews categorical thinking about identity. While the category of Apostolic still has limits, the binary logic of inside or outside based on a narrowly defined set of characteristics is opened up to variation at Forest Hill. The consistent framing of beliefs and practices as "matters of the heart" allows individuals to authentically adhere to their own chosen model while allowing others to use different models without the legitimacy of either being undermined.

7.2 **Interpretation**

This study contributes to scholarly understanding of both religious identity and boundaries by exploring the relationship between the social and the phenomenological. Forest Hill is stretching the boundaries of Apostolic identity by symbolically and socially including those outside of the institutional definition of what it means to be Apostolic.

This case problematizes thinking about members of particular religious communities as possessing monolithically stable and coherent systems of beliefs and practices. Not only are there differences in how official institutions define identity and inclusion and how individuals do in their everyday lives, but entire local communities may collectively have different definitions as well. While certain defining characteristics of those belonging to a particular identity category may remain somewhat stable over space and time others may be subject to variability. What is vital for community inclusion in one place or time may not be for others. Based on this analysis I propose that congregations may have a mediating effect between definitions of identity and boundaries at the institutional and individual levels. However, while discourse at the local level may aid in the creation of a more inclusive or exclusive culture, it does not guarantee that all members of a congregation will follow suit.

7.3 **Limitations**

As the boundary literature suggests, every act of inclusion is necessarily an act of exclusion of some other element. As stated before, the focus of this study on themes of inclusion and boundary blurring do not negate the fact that other types of boundary work occurred at Forest Hill. Instead, this study has focused on these themes as they are significant given the broader context of Forest Hill's denominational affiliation with a historically exclusive movement. Overall, discourse with an inclusive tone outweighed any exclusive talk that comes with the relational defining of identity.

While one of the main assertions of this study is that congregations play a mediating role between institutional and individual boundary work, causality cannot be

established in the relationship found in this case. To lend further support to this claim, future studies could conduct a comparative analysis that systematically studies the relationships between congregational and individual level discourse in conservative and liberal churches within the same denomination to see if there are consistent differences in their effects on individual boundary work. This research could potentially find that the significant difference is between institutional and individual boundary work independently and that local context plays a limited role in encouraging or dissuading boundary blurring strategies. In other words, the findings of this study could simply represent a more general boundary drawing phenomenon in which people blur boundaries regardless of context. In addition to studying other religious communities, researchers could also investigate the dynamics between these different levels of boundary and identity construction outside of religious contexts to see if dynamics similar to those proposed here are present in other domains as well.

Another methodological weakness is that this study examined public discourse and that the individual level discourse it does address was in the interview context and subject to the interview effects. The boundary blurring and downplay of difference could have been the result of interview effects, such as social desirability, such that respondents answered in a manner they thought would be normatively acceptable given the circumstance. Thus, it was unable to capture talk about Apostolic identity in everyday interactions between members in informal settings that could contain more candid boundary discourse. Additionally, while attempts to obtain diversity in the sample were made, the sample size of the interviewees is small and may not represent all views that might be expressed by congregation members. There may be members of Forest Hill who

have a more traditional view of what it means to be Apostolic and feel like others have "strayed outside the fence" but I did not encounter them in the course of interviews or observations. I do not assume that if public discourse is inclusive that all congregation members will automatically follow suit but that it simply gives more legitimacy to those who do.

7.4 **Conclusion**

This study has examined three distinct levels at which religious identities can be constructed: the institutional, the congregational, and the individual. Further, it has examined the relationships between these levels to better understand their effects on one another in constructing identities and the boundaries that define them. The case of Forest Hill Apostolic Church demonstrates that the boundary work being done to define identities at these different levels are not simply mirrors of one another but that a dynamic process is taking place. While there were patterned consistencies in what was talked about, how and with what emphasis they were talked about varied between levels. Respondents also suggest that there are spatial and temporal differences in how closely linked these levels are. Forest Hill also offers unique insights in that represents a case where a deliberate redefinition of the boundaries of inclusion is taking place. Belonging at Forest Hill is redefined to symbolically and socially include alternative ways of being Apostolic and Christian that would violate boundaries in other congregations and at other times.

REFERENCES

Adler, Gary. 2012. "An Opening in the Congregational Closet? Boundary-Bridging Culture and Membership Privileges for Gays and Lesbians in Christian Religious Congregations." *Social Problems* 59(2):177-206.

Ammerman, Nancy. 2003. "Religious Identities and Religious Institutions" Pp. 207-224 in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion,* edited by Michelle Dillion. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ammerman, Nancy. 2007. *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso

Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Random House.

Bok, Jared. "Symbolic Filtering: Selectively Permeable Evangelical Boundaries in an Age of Religious Pluralism." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53(4): 808-825.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984[1979]. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brubaker, Rodgers, Mara Loveman and Peter Stamatov. 2004 "Ethnicity as Cognition". *Theory and Society* 33:31-64.

Cohen, Anthony. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. New York: Routledge.

Cerulo, Karen A. 1997. "Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23:385-409.

Dearman, Marion. 1974. "Christ and Conformity: A Study of Pentecostal Values." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13(4):437-453.

Dillon, Michele. 1999. *Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith, and Power.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Douglas, Mary. 1986. *How Institutions Think.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Durkheim, Emile. 1954 [1912]. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life.* Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Edgell, Penny. 2003. "In Rhetoric and Practice: Defining 'The Good Family' in Local Congregations." Pp. 164-178 in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion,* edited by Michelle Dillion. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Edgell, Penny. 2012. "A Cultural Sociology of Religion: New Directions.*" Annual Review of Sociology* 38:247-265.

Edgell, Penny and Derek Robey. 2016. "Loose Connections and Liberal Theology: Blurring the Boundaries in Two Church-Based Communities of Spiritual Practice." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54(4):649-667.

Hackett, Conrad and D. Michael Lindsay. 2008. "Measuring Evangelicalism: Consequences of Different Operationalization Measures." *Journal for the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 47(3):499-514.

Hermanowicz, Joseph C. and Harriet P. Morgan. 1999. "Ritualizing the Routine: Collective Identity Affirmation." *Sociological Forum* 14(2):197-214.

Hogg, Michael A. and Scott A. Reid. 2006. "Social Identity, Self-Categorization, and Communication of Group Norms." *Communication Theory* 16:7-30.

Jenkins, Richard. 2014. *Social Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Lamont, Michele and Virag Molnar. 2002. "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28:167-195.

Lamont, Michele. 1992. *Money, Morals, and Manners*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lamont, Michele. 2000. *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lamont, Michele. 2001. "Culture and Identity". Pp. 171-185 in *Handbook of Sociological Theory,* edited by Jonathan H. Turner. New York: Springer.

Lizardo, Omar, and Michael Strand. 2009. "Skills, Toolkits, Contexts, and Institutions: Clarifying the Relationship Between Different to Cognition in Cultural Sociology." *Poetics* 38: 204-227.

Mermis-Cava, Jonathan. 2009. "An Anchor and a Sail: Christian Meditation as the Mechanism for a Pluralist Religious Identity." *Sociology of Religion* 70(4):432-453.

Moon, Dawne. 2004. *God, Sex, and Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rubin, Herbert J., and Irene Rubin. 2012. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Schwalbe, Michael L. and Douglas Mason-Schrock. 1996. "Identity Work as Group Process." *Advances in Group Processes* 13:113-147.

Sewell, Jr., William H. 2005. "Concept(s) of Culture." Pp. 152-174 in *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sherkat, Darren E. 2003. "Religious Socialization: Sources of Influence and Influence of Agency" Pp. 151-163 in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion,* edited by Michelle Dillion. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Shoshana, Avi. 2007. "The Phenomenology of a New Social Category: The Case of the Gifted Disadvantaged in Israel." *Poetics* 35(6): 352-367.

Smith, Christian. 1999. *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies". *American Sociological Review* 51(2): 273-286.

Synan, Vinson. 1997. *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Tajfel, Henry and John C.Turner, 1986. "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior." Pp. 7-24 in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by Worchel, S. and W.G. Austin. Chicago: Nelson Hall.

Thumma, Scott. 1991. "Renegotiating a Religious Identity: The Case of the Gay Evangelical." *Sociological Analysis* 52(4): 333-347

Wilkins, Amy C. 2008. "'Happier than Non-Christians': Collective Emotions and Symbolic Boundaries Among Evangelical Christians." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 71(3):281-301.

Wuthnow, Robert. 2005. *America and the Challenge of Religious Diversity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Wuthnow, Robert. 2011. "Taking Talk Seriously: Religious Discourse as Social

    Practice." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50(1):1-21.

Yukich, Grace. 2010. "Boundary Work in Inclusive Groups: Constructing Identity at the

    New York Catholic Worker." *Sociology of Religion* 71(2): 172-196.

Zerubavel, Eviatar. 1991. *The Fine Line: Making Distinctions in Everyday Life*. Chicago:

    University of Chicago Press.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Ministerial

1. How long have you worked at [church]?
2. How did you become involved in ministry? Was there any particular training involved?

Religious/Collective Identity

3. Would you identify with the title "Christian"? Can you tell me the story of how you became a Christian?
4. I know some people identify with certain labels or categories/traditions. Are there any that you identify with?
5. What does it mean to be a [whatever they identify as]? What are the characteristic traits?
   a. Is there something unique about their lifestyle or the way they conduct themselves?

Outgroups

6. How does being a [self-label] distinguish you from other Christians? What are the differences?
   a. Do you think these kinds of labels and differences among Christians are very important these days? Why or why not?
7. Do you see any groups of people in our society that are hostile or opposed to Christianity? Who? Why do you perceive them as hostile?
   a. How should Christians respond to them?
8. Do you see any beliefs or ideas in our society that are hostile to opposed to Christianity? What are they? Why do you perceive them as hostile?
9. Do you think Christians should engage with or separate themselves from the broader culture?

Beliefs

10. What are the most important things for Christians to believe? Are these beliefs necessary to be a Christian?
11. Do you believe there is such thing as absolute truth? If so, how do we know it?
    a. What is the ultimate authority for Christians?
12. Would you agree or disagree with the statement: "There is one true God and one morality that applies to everyone for their own good, whether they know it or like

it or not. So those morals, and not others, should govern how people live"? And why would you agree or disagree?

13. Would you agree or disagree with the statement: "Each person has to decide for themselves how to live; nobody can force another to believe or live a certain way; it has to come from each individual's heart"? And why would you agree or disagree?

Generosity Concept

14. How would you define generosity?
    a.   Are there any other words you associate with generosity?
15. How do you think people become generous?
16. Why do you think people act in generous ways?

Generosity and Religion

17. Do you think there is a connection between Christianity and generosity? What is it?
18. Are Christians required to be generous?
    a.   How should they display that generosity?
19. Do you view other religious traditions as being generous?

Generosity and the Congregation

20. Is your congregation involved in any kind of outreach or community engagement? What do you do?
    a.   Why do you do it?
    b.   Do you think of that as being generous?
21. Are there any things that members of your congregation do that you consider as acting generously?
22. Are there any particular ways you encourage your members to act generously?
23. Are there any particular causes your congregation feels are important to give to or support?

Conclusion

24. Is there anything that we have left out that you might want to add before we end?

*Parts adapted from Christian Smith's *American Evangelicalism* survey questions